

'Compassion, Heart and Love'

Lewis County Victim's Advocate Will Retire After 20 Years of Supporting Victims of Violent Crime

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For the past 20 years, Ann Basey has supported victims of crime and violence as the criminal cases against their perpetrators went through the court system.

As the victim assistance coordinator for Lewis County Superior Court, it is her job to advocate for the rights of victims, connect them with other resources in the community, and to help them through the slow and often traumatizing process of the criminal justice system.

While larger counties have multiple advocates, Lewis County only has one. At the end of June, after 20 years of work at the prosecutor's office, Basey, 60, will retire.

After a victim testifies during a trial, the person is often broken, upset and crying, said Lewis County Prosecutor Jonathan Meyer.

While the prosecutors need to continue on with the trial, Basey is there to help victims in their moments of trauma, he said.

"The compassion, the heart and the love she shows the victims is just amazing," Meyer said. "She deals with victims when they are going through their absolute worst."

Often, Basey said, victims of violent crime are plagued with one unanswerable question: Why?

"It's human nature to want to know why someone would do something so horrendous," she said. "There really is no answer because of the fact that no answer is good enough."

The Centralia woman said her job takes a lot of compassion, and the desire to help others navigate a difficult path. It also requires her to not be judgmental and to help people see that there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

“She is a great victim’s advocate, a great human being and a great friend who truly loves what she does,” Meyer said of Basey. “God had definitely given her the heart for it.”

In the beginning of her career, she said she cried a lot while learning how to help others.

Even after 20 years, Basey said, there are still cases that make her emotional.

“You really have to be strong for the person who’s not,” she said. “I can’t be an emotional wreck and help someone.”

Victims have few rights in the court system, she said, and often those rights bump up against the defendant’s rights.

Throughout her career, Basey said she has seen a crucial change in the court system as it has become more aware of the importance of the victims’ voice, especially at court hearings where the judge imposes a jail or prison sentence.

During those hearings, victims are given an opportunity to address the judge and the defendant.

“It’s a very big part of the healing process,” she said. “They have so little voice, it’s really their only time to talk about the trauma.”

While most attorneys advise their clients not to say anything at the hearings, she said, a few choose to speak. Throughout two decades of work, she said she has heard only a few apologies that appeared sincere.

One of the most memorable moments in her career, Basey said, involved a young woman who was charged with vehicular homicide after hitting an elderly man with her car.

The woman had been driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol and had drove onto the curb, and hit the man who was walking with his wife, she said.

The woman was represented by Meyer, who was working as a defense attorney at the time, she said. Prior to the woman’s sentencing hearing, Meyer asked Basey if the victim’s wife would be willing to have a moment alone with the defendant.

The widow agreed, Basey said, and she, Meyer and the two women sat down together.

The defendant apologized to the widow for what she did, and for the loss she caused her, Basey said.

The widow then took the defendant's hands in her own, and accepted her apology. The widow then told the young woman she hoped she would be able to find a new path in life without drugs and alcohol.

"It was such a moment of sincere apology," she said. "It was an incredible moment."